

**BINODE BEHARI MUKHERJEE**

**LALIT KALĀ  
AKADEMI**



**LALIT KALA SERIES**

OF

**CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART**

This series dealing with contemporary Indian Art has been undertaken by the Lalit Kala Akademi with the intention of popularising the work of India's leading painters and sculptors.

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BINODE BEHARI MUKHERJEE

LALIT KALĀ AKADEMİ  
INDIA

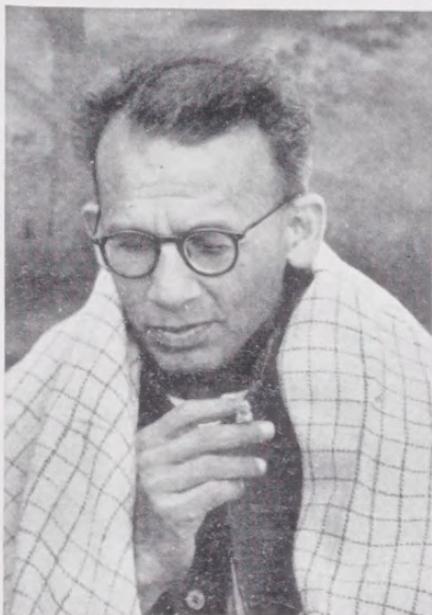


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**BINODE BEHARI  
MUKHERJEE**

A self reliant, introspective youth, independent almost to the point of being lonely. The insistent forms and colours of the hot, arid, eroded, wide open land of Birbhum, and the sturdy simplicity of the local folk life. The permeative presence of the aesthetic ideals of Rabindranath Tagore. The encouragement of creative freedom in the teaching of Nandalal Bose and the exquisiteness of the example of Abanindranath Tagore. The possibility of a cultural regeneration. In the context, these were of importance.

Binode Behari Mukherjee commenced by finding his themes from everyday life, by turning away from what was widely accepted at the time : the revival of illustration of myths and legends.

His intellectual curiosity led to an analytical awareness of the many modalities of art.

His calm acceptance of a theme that happened to be given, did not imply detachment. Binode Behari was committed to reiterate the experience of the mystery of the ordinary world. In his early work, the inelegant, the commonplace is rescued and lifted up and invested with an almost oppressive importance. In the tempera painting of the **BRIDGE** (1932) the dilapidated sombre structure stands brooding in a breathless atmosphere. A personal tragic sense of life is transferred to a familiar object. The culmination of this phase is seen in the portrait of the **TREE LOVER** (1932) and in the tempera panel, **WOODLAND** (1938). A solitary tree creates a torrid, primeval, nostalgic forest. The organisation is compact, modelled forms are rigid and heavy, colours are deep and restrained, and space is close with a tactile density.



The 'expressionism' of his early work may be compared with the reduction of means and the seeking of the dark emotive essence of the subject, in the paintings and the graphic work of some of the German Expressionists of the Brücke group.

Later in his development the cumulative effects of his prolonged studies in Chinese and Japanese painting and the traditional craft forms of India began to be clearly felt. A visit to Japan in 1936 was particularly important in his mature stylistic orientation.

An admirer of the Tosa school of painting, Binode Behari was impressed by the bold surface divisions, the unerring placement of abstract areas of intense colour, the refinement of stylized shapes, and the precise economy of lines, all unified in acute confrontation and juxtaposition in the melancholy grandeur of the screens of Tawaraya Sotatsu, the 17th century painter, designer and master craftsman. In considering Georges Seurat along with Sotatsu, Binode Behari reveals his affinities with the profoundly ornamental, which, for all its analogies, metaphors and lucidities, betrays a deep romanticism at the core.

The paintings that follow, are characterized by diagrammatic subdivisions of space, consistent layout of patches of colour from a deliberately limited palette, chromatic and textural enrichment of superimposed colour-touches and dots. Basic shapes generalized from an observation of nature are mediated by the calligraphy of lines. The calligraphy of Binode Behari has reference not only to the methods of the indigenous craft traditions and those of ancient Indian painting, but equally to the incisive lines of a Toba Sojo or to the sustained scribbling of a Rodin. While bringing forth representational analogies, this calligraphy remains ambiguously independent and abstract.

The dark introspection of the earlier work is finally spent in an openness to the world. The new phase alternates between a modelled architectonic reconstruction of the obvious experienced as significant, and an abbreviated, swift graphological delineation of the essence of things. The sense of otherness of landscape and objects as prevailing over and against





man, yields to an increasing concern with the reconciled human image that encompasses nature.

Painter of many concentrated works of modest dimensions, Binode Behari is a muralist by preference. In the expansive context of his murals the smaller paintings may be imagined as though they were a series of self-sufficient units.

The **CEILING** in egg tempera (1940) is a summing up of his life-long studies in the plastic-graphic equivalent forms for the characteristic land and the people of Birbhum. This work has a central focal point, and from there spreads in waves in all directions, into many figurations of the parched red earth, the typical trees and plants, the common animals and the local villagers. Deep rich colour areas as freely interlocked and are held hovering from the plane of the ceiling. Calligraphic lines waxing and waning, execute an intricate dance on the archipelago of colours.

A considerably larger work is the fresco buono on the lives of the **HINDI SAINTS** (1946-7). Binode Behari was moved by the simple, inspired people of the soil, the medieval unworldly poets. The mural, occupying three walls of a hall, is densely populated with numerous types and characters painstakingly studied from life and from old paintings. Partitioned with segments of architecture or fragments of landscape, the consecutively laid out divisions of picture space are receptacles for human figures, and are reminiscent of principles of composition found in early Indian painting and rock-cut reliefs. The colours are subdued, and the broadly modulated rugged volumes are interrelated into a processional structure.

In his many drawings, sketches, woodcuts, drypoints and litho-

graphs, ideas for painting are often tried out. Occasionally a subject is treated with a sense of dry humour. But more frequently the work develops beyond tentativeness to completion in the characteristics of the medium chosen.

The vitality of script interested Binode Behari. With an ever-tensioned brushwork he has given fresh configurations to the elegant pen-forms of the cursive Bengali hand.

Convinced that values of art should participate in the humble context of everyday living, Binode Behari has designed many motifs appropriate to such crafts as textiles, wood and metal work. Sometimes developed as collage, these synoptic shapes and colours are emblematic.

In the relaxed manipulation of wax in a few sculptures, each small enough to be held in a hand, there is an approximative quality of touch similar to the handling of pigments in his oil paintings since 1950.

Time and again, response to a new environment or involvement with a technical effect, has introduced specific and distinctive variations to the general tenor of his work. Occasional paintings in oils and watercolours has brought to his tempera a certain uncalculated colouristic complexity, transparency, and to an extent, suggestions of atmosphere.



Two paintings in tempera from his mature development may illustrate the achievement of unity of diverse pictorial ideas and technical means. **IN THE GARDEN** (1948) is a calligraphic transcription of a fragment of experience that accepts without fore-boding or afterthought, the immediacy of existence. All is calligraphy. The soft lines, the blunt patches of colours with their unselfconscious reiteration, the units of 'written' or pictographic reference to forms, the unforced innocent composition. Having no emphatic single point of interest, there is an equable intermingling of figures, trees, house in a poetic unity.

**TEMPLE BELL** (1952) is suffused with a tonal ambience. Colouristic modulation causes forms to emerge in fluctuating moderate saliences. This evocation of volumes almost predominates over the calligraphic movement of lines. Colour is not used as pigment, but rather as light. The everyday scene is turned into a reverie. In such works the subject acquires an inner life which has shed the earlier tragic overtones.

Whatever his chosen range of artistic means, Binode Behari Mukherjee creates transmuted images of the contingent world. These images are contained but vital and celebrant.

Prithwish Neogy















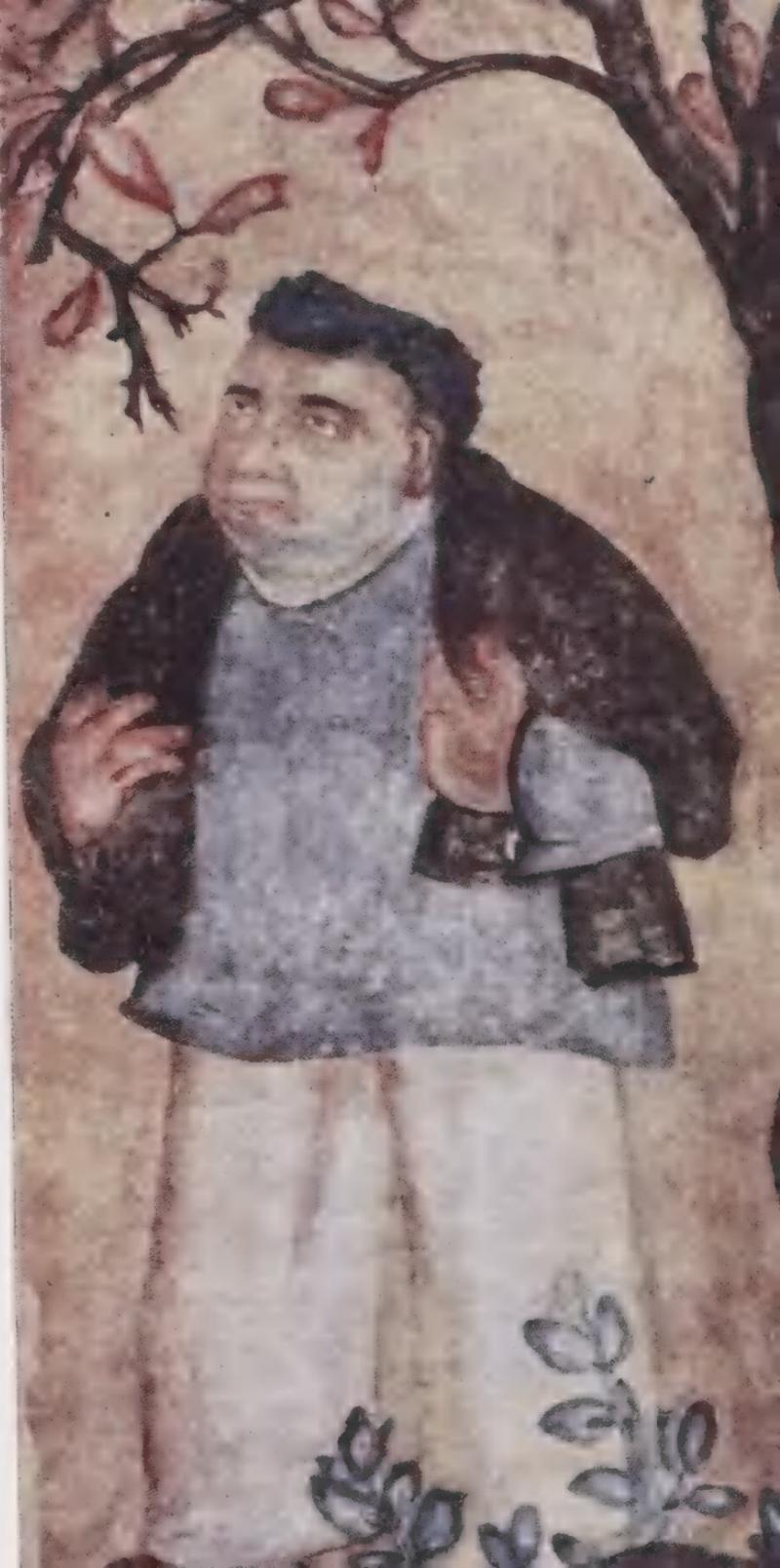








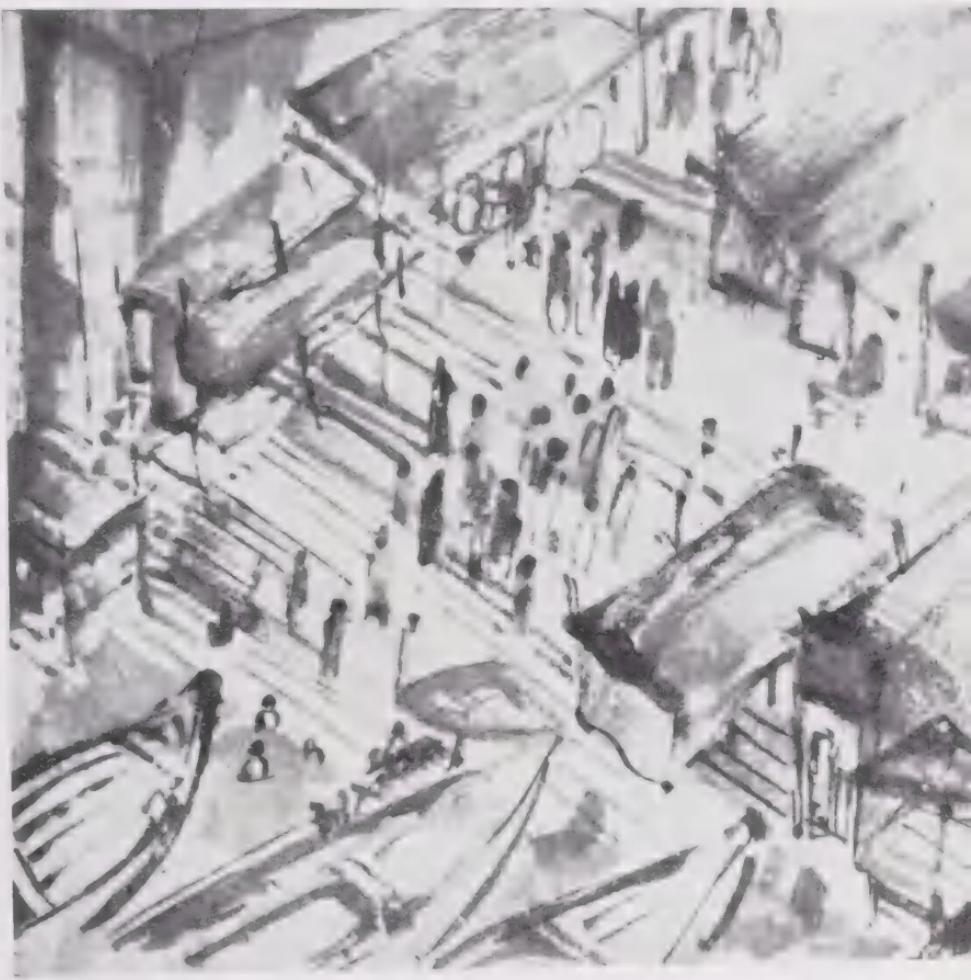














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BINODE BEHARI MUKHERJEE—LALIT KALA AKADEMI

No.	Title	Medium	Size	Year	Collection
1	April	Oil	52x65 cm.	1928	Artist
2	Winter Noon	Tempera on cloth	52x65	1931	Rani Chanda
3	The Bridge	"	52x63.5	1932	National Gallery of Modern Art
4	Woodland	Egg Tempera on Wood	46x35.5	1938	do ✓
5	Picture Dealer's Shop, Japan	Water Colour	24x26.5	1937	Private Collection
6	Ceiling	Egg Tempera	6m 2.5 cm x2m 57 cm	1940	Kala Bhavan Hostel, Santiniketan
7	Detail of Ceiling				"
8	"				"
9	Sun Flowers	Water Colour	33x41	1940	Artist
0	Palm Trees	Water colour on cloth	36x28		K. R. Kripalani
1	Tree Lovers	Tempera	67.5x52	1932	National Gallery of Modern Art
2	Forest Road at Night	Crayon	28x23	1942	Artist
3	Lotus	Water Colour	38x53.5	1942	Dinkar Kowshik
4	Woman Sewing	Tempera on cloth	60x50		Rani Chanda
5	Banaras Ghats	Water Colour	30.5x30.5	1943	Dinkar Kowshik
6	Banaras	Ink	42x33	1943	Artist
7	"	"	44.5x54.5	1943	Artist
8	The Medieval Hindu Sainis (detail)	Fresco Buono	23m 8 cm wide	1947	Hindi Bhavan Santiniketan
9	"	( a fragment )			"
0	"	( detail )			"
1	Temple Bell	Tempera	66x40.5	1952	National Gallery of Modern Art
2	Nepal—Procession	Water Colour	25.5x35.5	1949	do
3	Girl at Work	Woodcut			
4	Play	Oil	19x60	1954	National Gallery of Modern Art
5	In the Garden	Tempera	36x36	1948	Private Collection
6	Calligraphy	Ink	38x51	1957	Artist

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Born in 1904 in Behala, Bengal. Binode Behari Mukherjee was educated in several local schools—he had to give up his studies for several years due to illness. He joined Santiniketan in 1917 and the Art Department called Kala Bhavan in 1919. Benode Behari was one of the outstanding students of Nandaial Bose. He started teaching at Santiniketan from 1925 and besides was also Librarian and Curator of the small museum there. His teaching methods were very free recognising the individuality of each student. Binode Behari worked mainly in tempera but was also interested in oils and especially in mural painting in which he tried various techniques. He visited Japan in 1937-38 and was impressed by the works of such painters as Sesshu, Sotatsu and others. He continued teaching at Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan till 1949. Later he visited Nepal as Curator of the Government Museum, Nepal and adviser to the Education Department there. In 1951-52 he worked at the Vanasthal Vidhyapith in Rajasthan. In 1952 he settled in Mussoorie, U.P. and started an Art Training Centre and Children's School. In 1954 he was appointed at Patna to reorganise the Art School there. His eyes were always very weak and after a major operation in 1956 the artist lost his sight completely. He has again joined Kala Bhavan since 1958 where he is a member of the Faculty teaching Art Theory. Binode Behari Mukherjee has travelled extensively over Northern India and is intimately acquainted with Indian Art conditions. He is one of the few artists of his generation who wrote on art matters, his judgment and aesthetic evaluations have been of great importance because of the clarity and sobriety of his views and the freedom from sentiment and prejudice of his writings. Binode Behari Mukherjee has been exhibiting his paintings since 1921 when they were first remarked on in a collective exhibition of the Indian Society of Oriental Art. Exhibitions of his work have been held in Calcutta, Bombay, Mussoorie and Tokyo. His works are in the National Gallery of Modern Art, Rabindra Bharati and other public and private collections. Among this artist's important works must be cited his murals in various techniques which he has been experimenting with since 1923. His major creations in this medium are the Hostel Ceiling, Kala Bhavan 1940, 1942 and the fresco in Hindi Bhavan, Santiniketan, 1947.





*already published*

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